Life Before the Railroads

- 1st white settlers were Valentine and Rachel Darnall who settled about 7 miles south of Fairbury on what is now Indian Creek in 1830

SO 1830 IS BEGINNING OF OUR TIME PERIOD !

- **When did the Railroads come to Livingston County?**

1. The first railroad in Livingston County was the Chicago & Mississippi Railroad, running from Joliet to Alton. It was built in 1853 and 1854. A few years later, it was purchased by T. B. Blackstone and renamed the Chicago & Alton Railroad. Initially, the stations on the main line were Dwight, Odell, Cayuga, Pontiac, and Ocoya.

2. In 1857, the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria to the Indiana border. The villages of Fairbury and Chatsworth were created on the new railroad. This railroad was later renamed the TP&W (Toledo, Peoria, and Warsaw Railroad).

3. In 1872, the new Chicago & Paducah Railroad started track construction in Streator and ran southeast through Livingston County. It then ran through Ford, Champaign, Piatt, Moultrie, Shelby, and Effingham Counties to Altamont. The stations in Livingston County included Newtown, Cornell, Rowe, Pontiac, McDowell, Lodemia, Fairbury, Murphy's Station, and Strawn. Later renamed to the Wabash.

- **So, time period we are talking about is 1830 to the mid 1850s**
    1. **about 25 years**

- **Settlers chose a spot on a creek or river to build their log cabin**
    1. Everyone "knew" you had to have your house on a creek/river with timber
    2. I checked all of the first settlers in 3 Fairbury area townships and 100% settled on a creek or river!

- Today, to build a new house, every component is available from a local lumberyard or big box store like Lowes, Menards, Home Depot

    1. Average American house has over 100,000 parts/components

- **What was available to those early settlers between 1830 and 1855?**
    1. 0 building components
    2. 0 nails
    3. 0 planed boards because no sawmills
    4. 0 hardware of any kind
    5. 0 glass for any windows

- **So, they brought their tools with them to make their 1st log cabin**
    1. Hand-ax
    2. broad-ax
    3. Cross-cut saw
    4. Hand-saw
    5. Auger or drill
    6. Adze ---to make boards flat...Take with me to Forrest
    7. Draw-shave
    8. Froe .. for splitting logs into shingles
    9. Two or three iron wedges to split logs
    10. Also…..Horse team to drag logs to the log cabin build site

- McDowells one of few early settlers **with some glass windows in their log cabin.** They brought a few panes of glass with them……..

    1. Per the 1878 History Book…….

       The boards which furnished the material for the door and window casing of this primitive dwelling, were purchased of the Kickapoo Indians, and were brought from Oliver's Grove with an ox team.

       The Indians had hewn them out for some purpose of their own, but 'were induced to part with them for a small supply of ammunition.

- **Food and water – had to be completely self-reliant in themselves**

    1. Water for drinking and cooking – from creek or river nearby

        1. Shallow wells dug by **later settlers** away from creek/rivers

    2. **Food to eat**
        1. Likely brought some seeds with them for the 1st garden

        2. **Sometimes brought animals with them including:**
            1. Chickens (eggs and meat)
            2. Hogs
            3. Goats
            4. Cows

        3. **from Mother Nature**

            1. Fish from creek or river

            2. Hunting

                1. First surveys in the 1830s of Livingston County reported timber ½ mile wide on each side of the Vermilion River, rest was swamp and prairie

                2. Game was very abundant between 1830 and mid 1850s when land rush claimed all the land and it was all farmed

                    1. Very few settlers in Livingston County between 1830 and about 1853
                        1. The 1840 Census = 759 pioneer settlers
                        2. The 1850 Census = 1,552
                        3. The 1860 Census = 11,637

                    2. Congress passed Script Act which gave free land to military veterans, primarily War of 1812 Veterans.

3. Rush of settlers between 1853 and by 1860 all land in Livingston was purchased from Federal Government

4. From Lucille Goodrich's book about school history:

    1. Deer (often more than 100 in a herd)
    2. Wild turkey
    3. pigeons
    4. Opossums
    5. Ducks
    6. Geese
    7. Quail

5. Deer very plentiful back then……..

    1. John Johnson was another pioneer settler who came to Rook's Creek, just west of Pontiac, in the 1830s.

    2. In the Fall of 1834, John Johnson and his sons killed 75 deer.

    3. They transported the deer skins and hams by wagon to Ottawa, where they sold them for $65. This amount is equivalent to $2,015 in today's dollars.

- **Food Preservation**

    1. Salt was critical for preserving meat for 1000s of years
        1. From Mayflower up until 1860s when ice was used
        2. Frozen ice until 1950s when mechanical refrigeration invented and everyone had a refrigerator and/or freezer

    2. **How does salt preserve meat?**

        1. Absorbs water from the meat so bacteria can not grow

    3. **How exactly did you use the salt to preserve meat?**

        1. Rub in salt or pack the meat in layers of salt and meat
            1. Smoke after salting – last for 6 months to a year
            2. Or just pack in layers, no smoking required

        2. **Where did salt come from for the Midwest?**

            1. Salt springs in southeast Illinois near Equality, Illinois
                1. Called Saline Salt Works
                2. In far southeastern Illinois, not far from Ohio River

            2. Native American made bowls from clay, filled with saltwater and let water evaporate, leaving salt crystals
                1. Very inefficient for natural evaporation

            3. Settlers boiled saltwater in iron kettles using wood to make the fires
                1. Very labor intensive to cut the trees, reduce to firewood, and to boil the water

4. **A sordid history for the Saline Salt Works**

    1. U.S. government made treaty with Native Americans
    2. Government leased the salt works to private operators
    3. Operators had to pay lease money to government
    4. Equality, Illinois got its name because anyone was free to bid on the salt lease contracts
    5. One primary operator used black slaves for the salt works
    6. When Illinois became a state in 1818, many of the people living in Southern Illinois came from slave states and wanted the Constitution to allow slavery
    7. Saline Salt Works was critical to success of people moving into the state
    8. As a political compromise, special exemption in the 1818 Illinois Constitution to allow slavery for 7 more years only in the Saline Salt works
    9. U.S. government turned over ownership of salt works to new State of Illinois with stipulation it could not be sold
    10. During the first few years that Illinois was a state, the Saline Salt Works generated 33% of the state's revenue. This high dependence on the Saline Salt Works for state income gradually declined as more settlers moved to Illinois.
    11. When 1825 deadline approached, primary operator forced black slaves to sign long-term Indentured Servitude agreements lasting for decades!!

12. Salt works operated until owners death in 1871.

    1. Owner also had free blacks living in Illinois kidnapped, transported and sold in Southern slave states. “Reverse Underground Railroad” !!

13. **Sideline Note…**……..Equality got its name because anyone could bid on the salt lease contracts, but eventually 1818 Constitution allowed slavery to continue for 7 more years in the Saline Salt works!! IRONY

5. Early settlers likely got their salt when they took their grain to be milled at Ottawa, in Chicago, or from the local peddler

- **No Stores in Livingston County**

    1. Martin A. Newman of Newtown Township was the pioneer merchant of the County.

    2. In 1847, he left his home in Ottawa and made a tour of Livingston County.

    3. Mr. Newman could not find a single store in the entire County!!

    4. He decided to start a new business. He bought and fitted up a peddling wagon, filling it with a great variety of merchandise, ranging from a needle to a wash tub.

    5. Once a month, Mr. Newman and his peddling wagon visited every family living in Livingston County.

    6. In exchange for his goods, Mr. Newman accepted deer skins, mink skins, ginseng root, feathers, and many other articles.

    7. Mr. Newman became a favorite of the early settlers, and he soon built up an extensive and lucrative business.

    8. **No known peddlers in the 1830 to 1847 time period before Mr. Newman**

- **Farming**

    1. Pioneer farmers needed a way to mill their grain into flour, which could be used to make bread-related food products for the family to consume.

    2. Early farmers only had **3 choices** of where to take their grain to be milled. [Chicago, Ottawa, and Peoria]

    3. The most popular choice was to haul it by oxen-drawn wagon to Green's Mill in Ottawa.

        1. This mill was opened in 1830 by John Green on the Fox River about five miles northwest of Ottawa.

        2. Farmers had to haul their grain from Livingston County about 60 miles to Green's Mill on the north side of the Illinois River.

            1. Means they had to use a ferry across the river for their horse/ oxen/wagon

        3. Farmers often had to wait a day or two before it was their turn to get their grain milled.

        4. Farmers going to Green's Mill usually did some "store trading" at stores in Ottawa.

            1. Likely bought salt and cloth to make clothing

    4. **Another option was to get grain milled was a mill on Crow's Creek, south of Peoria.**

        1. This mill was also about 60 miles from Livingston County.

        2. Mr. Francis J. Moore, another pioneer settler, recounted that his first trip to the mill on Crow's Creek took one week.

        3. Sometime later, a new mill was built at Wilmington, but it was about as far away as the mill on Crow's Creek.

4. The first mill in Livingston County was built by Mr. Smith in Fairbury in about 1840. Mr. Smith's little mill was **powered by horses and not by water.**

5. **Thomas McDowell was one of the McDowell family, who were early settlers north of Fairbury.**

    1. Mr. McDowell recounted that when he came to Avoca, there were but three settlements between the Wabash country in Indiana and this place.

    2. The people did their milling at Green's mill, on the Fox River, and their "store trading" at Ottawa.

    3. Mr. McDowell's first trip to mill his grain was to Green's Mill, which took four days.

    4. Mr. McDowell contracted with a neighbor to take 24 bushels of grain to mill and have it ground for which he received fifty bushels of corn, worth the enormous sum of ten cents per bushel. ??

6. **The Kring family were early settlers just north of Fairbury.**

    1. John Kring recounted that he went on a trip to Chicago with his father.

    2. The elder Kring had one of the old-fashioned carriages, which cost him $600.

    3. They made the trip to Chicago in it, and while there, Mr. Kring was offered 160 acres of land in trade for the vehicle.

    4. As the land was under water, Mr. Kring decided he preferred the prairie of Livingston County.

    5. A few decades later, that 160 acres of land became downtown Chicago and was worth millions of dollars !!

7. **Corn Seeds**

    1. Each spring, need seed corn to plant the next year's crop

    2. Corn yields in the 1830s and 1840s was about 30 bushels to the acre

    3. Needed to save 1 bushel of seed corn for every 8 acres to be planted the next year.

    4. So 80 acres yielded 2,400 bushels
        1. Needed to save 10 bushels for seed corn for the next year

    5. Farming very tough occupation for the early settlers

        1. Land was swampy and crops often flooded out
        2. No way to get input supplies to farm
        3. No easy way to sell farm outputs for cash
        4. Very physical labor
        5. Had large families so children could help farm

- **Post Office**

    1. **Nearest Post Office was Bloomington**

    2. **Later a Post Office at Avoca at one of the McDowell's houses**

        1. Established in 1838

        2. Closed in 1872, became Ghost Town

    3. **Post office at a house in Indian Grove south of Fairbury**

        1. Established 1846, closed in 1859
            [Fairbury established in 1857]

    4. **Letter receiver had to pay the postage**

        1. Letters often sat unclaimed at Post Office because receiver had no cash to pay the postage !

            1. Newspapers often printed list of unclaimed mail

2. **First mail boy made trip from Ottawa to Bloomington, took 2 days to complete.**
    1. **George Washington Rice**
        1. Started the Ottawa to Bloomington mail route as a 15 year-old in 1839
        2. He went by horse and stopped at Avoca and then Indian Grove Post Offices
    2. We have his stories of doing this job including using boards to walk across the frozen Illinois River in Ottawa
    3. The only compensation for traveling in the bad weather was traveling when the weather was nice…..
    4. It was noted the mail carrier "got to enjoy the gorgeous color of the prairies with the wild free life of bird and beast, full rivers pressing their wooded shores, and variegated fields of green and gold blending with the purple skyline."

- **Children's Toys**

    1. Home made toys

        1. Father could whittle or carve simple toys from wood
           -little wagons
           -whistles

        2. Mother could make dolls for her daughters
            1. Corn husk dolls 1st made by Native Americans
            2. Early settlers in American learned about them from Native Americans

- **Health**

1. From Lucille Goodrich's History Book

    1. Early settlers brought with them malaria, milk fever, and other diseases to add to those already found here.

    2. **Malaria was called:**

        1. the ague
        2. shakes
        3. the chills
        4. bilious fever
        5. intermittent or remittant typhoid and typhus
        6. autumnal fever

    3. **Conditions were ideal for the development of malaria:**

        1. swampy and undrained land

        2. Mosquitoes were plentiful

        3. Quinine, used to cure the ague, but it caused your ears to roar and gave one a feeling of great lassitude
        .

    4. **If a woman became proficient in caring for the sick, she was in great demand.**

        1. She used home remedies usually made from herbs or applied poultices like mustard plaster.

    5. **Physicians were scarce and unschooled.**

        1. Their chief "stock in trade" consisted of quinine, calomel, castor oil, laudanum and camphor dissolved in alcohol.

    6. Taking baths and changing clothes were **not** always included in the day's schedule.

7. Chewing tobacco and the subsequent "spitting" were common among adults.

8. Alcoholic beverages were freely used both in sickness and in health.

9. **Windows were not protected by any kind of screening and flies were abundant.**

    1. Rats and roaches added their share. Some of the so-called "filth" diseases were typhoid, diptheria, cholera, yellow fever and smallpox.

10. In 1849 an epidemic of cholera swept through the county.

11. Other illnesses such as pneumonia, influenza, consumption (tuberculosis), milk sickness, rheumatism, tetanus, food poisoning and snakebite also flourished.

12. The birth rate was high but so was the death rate.

13. A forty-year old man or woman was considered old.

14. It is estimated that half the children born in Illinois in pioneer days died before reaching five years of age, usually from digestive disorders.

- **Summary**

    1. Life before the railroads was a very challenging life

    2. Pioneer families had to be very self-reliant on themselves because not many neighbors to help

    3. Railroads changed everything when they arrived in the 1850s:

        1. Farmers had a way to get the inputs needed to grow their crops and raise livestock

        2. Farmers had an easy way to sell their farm products to far away city markets

        3. Influx of people into the county resulted in more doctors, stores, and eventually country schools with teachers

    4. It is extremely difficult for us to imagine this lifestyle since most of us grew up with:

        1. Stores where we can buy about anything we need

        2. Well trained doctors with drugs that actually worked and well-equipped hospitals

        3. Well trained teachers and well equipped classrooms

        4. Other modern conveniences including refrigerators, electricity, automobiles, etc

        5. **I hope I gave you a little idea of what life was like for these pioneer settlers !!**

- **Questions?**